

Employers Take Notice of Certified Professionals



The designations of Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) and Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP), administered under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC), are increasingly becoming the gold standard in disability management practice worldwide. In 2011, an additional 84 individuals across Canada successfully passed these internationally recognized certification examinations, joining the ever-expanding force of certified professionals currently located in 10 countries. In this first of three bulletins on the topic, Canada's recently designated CRTWCs and CDMPs share insights into their educational backgrounds, previous experience, current careers, and plans for the future.

Designation helps CRTWC land new job

Deborah Kuefler, CRTWC, joined Banyan Work Health Solutions in Edmonton, AB at the end of September and she's clear that her designation was one of the factors that helped her gain the new job.

"I do know that one of the things Banyan is looking for is education. Because of the certification, they were impressed. They thought it was a great accomplishment."

Along with earning the CRTWC designation in 2011, Kuefler holds a Biology Sciences Diploma; her early career was spent working in research labs. After that, she became the only staff member at the local Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, providing administrative support for people in her area. "I had personal knowledge of hearing loss—someone I know—so I knew a lot about the impact and what was available for people."

Although her experience in disability management (DM) at that point had been indirect, she began looking for more education to tie together her science background and her growing interest in DM.

She enrolled in the two-year Disability Management Diploma Program at Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton, graduating in 2009. "I knew I would really enjoy this type of work. I liked bringing what I knew and helping people get back to work."

Looking for a job that went beyond administration, Kuefler accepted a disability management position at Finning Canada, later moving to the Good Samaritan Society where she was involved in everything from return to work plans to short-term and long-term disability files, and also assisted with workplace issues for anyone on sick leave.

Then, two years after completing her diploma, she and two other "study buddies" got together to study for the 2011 CRTWC exam. Kuefler said that once she was certified and looking for work, "I had people calling me."

In the meantime, she and her two friends, who had all passed the CRTWC exam together, had each applied for disability management jobs at Banyan Work Health Solutions. All three were hired at the same time.

Kuefler is enjoying her new position. "I'm working more on complex cases and learning a lot." She adds, "Because of my education, my focus is getting people back to work. I bring that to the forefront and it is evident in my work."



Although her plans are to remain in Western Canada, she is pleased that the CRTWC designation is an international one. “It impresses me that it is recognized across Canada and internationally. It proves to me that people understand the value of the job and that a designation is in place to be sure the appropriate people are doing the job.”

Motivated CDMP with kinesiology degree thrives in healthcare sector

Stephanie Stalker graduated from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology, along with a Health and Fitness Certificate. Still trying to figure out what she wanted to do with her degree, she began doing volunteer training work with a local lacrosse team. She put together programs to help the players avoid injuries and to assist them when they were injured, which happened a lot. Two years ago, that early volunteer work, along with a stint at a rehab clinic, led to her current position as a disability management consultant with the Fraser Health Authority. She is one of about 20 DM consultants across the Lower Mainland responsible for around 26,000 healthcare employees. Stalker works specifically on-site at Surrey Memorial Hospital and also with the Delta Hospital. Her job involves case management of injured and ill employees, who may be off work or struggling at work. In her job, she comes into close contact with the Insurance Corporation of BC, WorkSafeBC, long-term disability carriers, and various healthcare unions.

Encouraged by her manager to try to get the CDMP designation as soon as possible after joining Fraser Health, she wrote and passed the CDMP exam in 2011, a move financially supported by her employer. “They paid for it and pay our ongoing fees,” she explains. “They also support our education through resources, links and webinars to keep up our knowledge.”

She is pleased that the CDMP is well recognized in her workplace. “The fact that we are encouraged to get that designation specifically, I feel a lot more confident in my skills. It shows I’ve taken time to specialize in my area of work.” She continues, “Plus, it is an area I’m interested in, so I’m motivated to learn everything I can about it. I was coming in as a brand new consultant and was new at a few things like accommodations. You get a lot more respect from the unions when you can show that you’ve taken the time to specialize in your area of work.”

Asked whether she would ever take her designation outside Canada, she says, “I’m a mom, so there are no plans in the near future, but working internationally has always interested me. To have that possibility opening up in 5 to 10 years time, it’s nice to have that option.”

International portability of designation interests CDMP with dual citizenship

Brendon Gill obtained a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from Dalhousie University, motivated by his interest in cognitive and physical ergonomics. After some time as an activity / recreation coordinator working with seniors, he began taking NIDMAR's online coursework, and shortly after found employment at Manulife Financial in the group disability department.

"At Manulife Financial, I assessed and managed disability claims for a number of client groups, many representatives of which I interacted with through online education modules," he advises.

While working on the NIDMAR education modules and thinking about pursuing the CDMP designation, he was looking for ways to focus his existing education, training and ability. His goal was to "present myself as someone to be taken seriously in the field of disability management."

"As I continued through the online education modules and employment in disability management, I found earning a CDMP designation increasingly important. Through my interaction with clients and co-workers, I saw a lot of inconsistencies in how disability management was handled, and certainly gaps in my own understanding of disability management best practices."

He completed all of the online modules and found that the three most beneficial and complementary to his work were Legislation and Disability Management, Workers' Compensation and Return to Work, and Disability Management in Unionized Organizations.

"Earning the CDMP designation then became about obtaining the knowledge to pass the examination and solidifying my understanding of disability management, while also establishing myself as a credible source of disability management information for clients and peers."

Gill successfully wrote the CDMP examination in 2011 and has recently moved to Canada Post to work as an Occupational Abilities Coordinator in Calgary, AB. His fast-paced, multi-faceted position includes extensive collaboration with managers, team leaders, employees, claims staff and other stakeholders in the DM, accommodation, return to work, and attendance management processes.

He believes the combined approach of education and obtaining the CDMP designation has improved his understanding of disability management best practices and has also improved his ability to act professionally in the field. On top of that, "I do believe that the designation has opened doors in disability management, especially employment opportunities where employers may not have otherwise given me as significant consideration."



In terms of current job benefits, he notes, “Specifically, understanding legislation, professional conduct, consensus best-practices and other aspects of disability management that may not be provided in corporate training (for example, when working in non-occupational disability) has been extremely beneficial in my job performance.”

Since Gill is a dual Canadian/Australian citizen he sees the benefits of holding a designation that “is portable and consistent internationally.” Plus, he does have plans to go abroad at some point. “I really look forward to attending an International Forum on Disability Management in the future, and the international locations only increase that interest!”